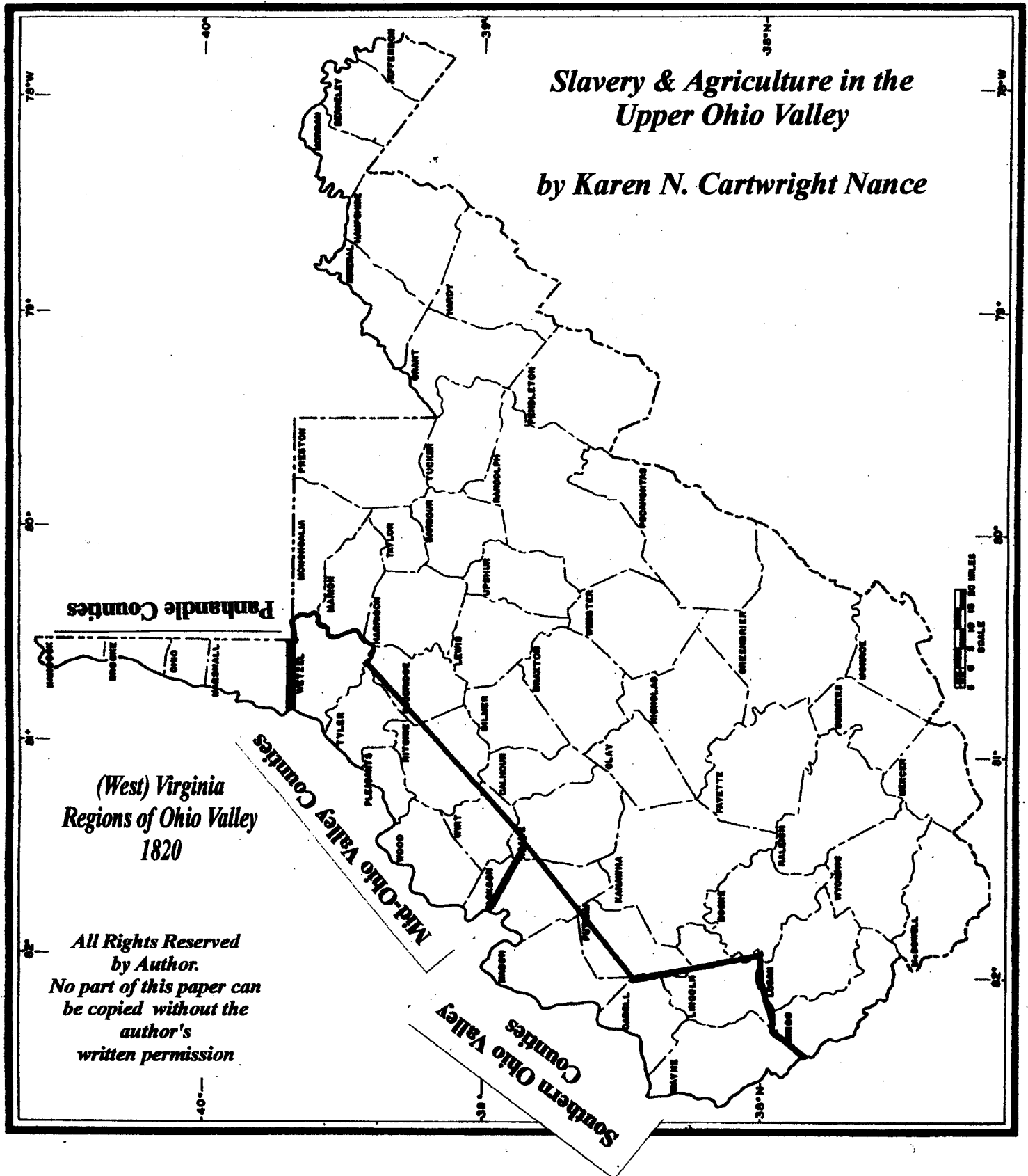


# Slavery & Agriculture in the Upper Ohio Valley

by Karen N. Cartwright Nance



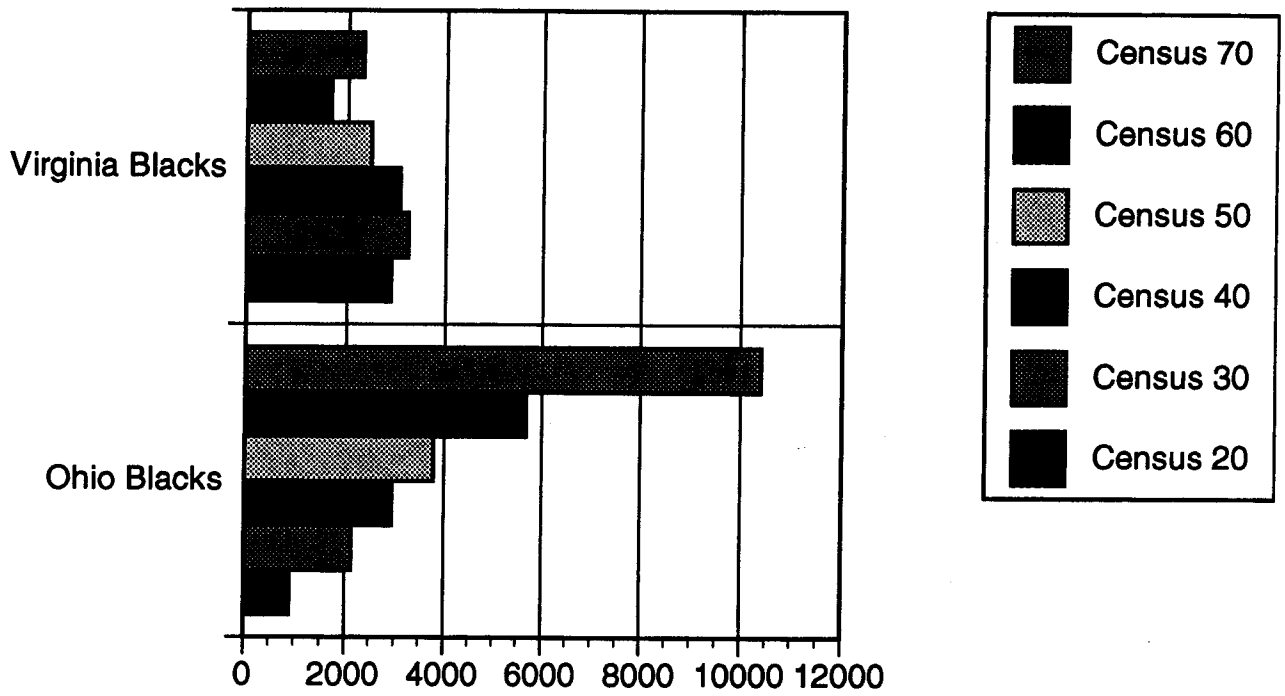
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## **Slavery & Agriculture in the Upper Ohio Valley Appalachian Conference - March 17, 2002**

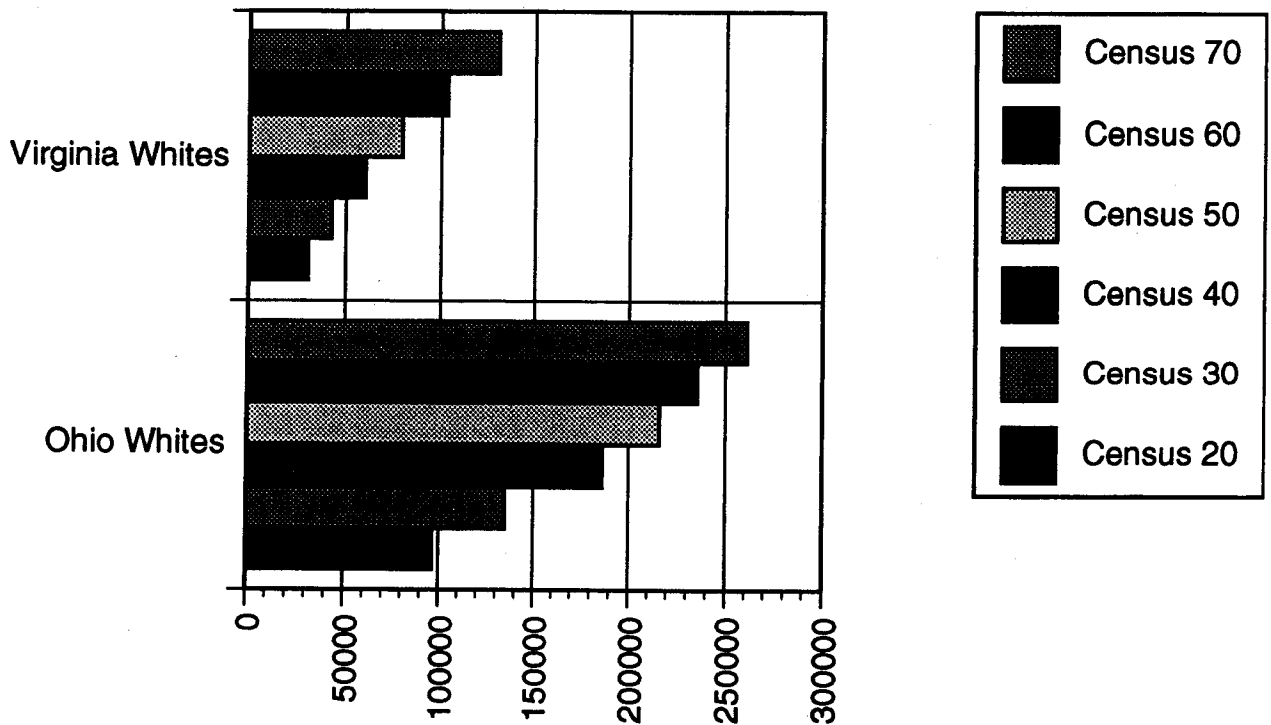
Slavery and Agriculture in the Upper Ohio Valley utilizes slave census schedules, census, and agriculture records (1790 - 1870) to identify contributions African-Americans made to the pre-Civil War economy in the upper Ohio Valley. Free African-Americans living in Virginia along the Ohio River are identified through public records, and their occupations and economic contributions examined. Free African-Americans living across the Ohio River in the State of Ohio as well as their involvement in the Underground Railroad are contrasted with their counterparts in Virginia. Thus, the mission of the research is to make the public aware of the vast economic contributions, especially in agriculture, made by African-Americans in the upper Ohio Valley prior to the Civil War. In addition, the research will expel the myth that few African-Americans lived in what became West Virginia; thus, they could not have contributed much to the economic and social growth of West Virginia. Though compared to Eastern Virginia, Western Virginia had a much smaller population of African-Americans, African-Americans contribution to the region was significant.

Settlers began moving into the Ohio Valley, first in forts, later in settlements, in the mid-1700s. At the same time, African-Americans, generally as slaves, began occupying the Ohio Valley. Early census record slaves in the State of Ohio / Northwest Territory as well as Virginia and Kentucky. It is difficult to determine just how many African-Americans lived along the Ohio River during this early settlement. Counties that bordered the Ohio River were larger and covered a much greater area which often included land 100 or more miles from the Ohio River. Thus, the earliest census of 1790 and 1800 do not provide conclusive data. The 1810 census for Virginia was destroyed. Therefore, the best period to begin research is 1820.

By 1820, the current Ohio Counties along the Ohio River were formed, but on the other bank of the Ohio River, Virginia and Kentucky counties were still developing into the



Upper Ohio Valley Slaves and Free Blacks, 1820-1870.



Upper Ohio Valley White Population, 1820-1870.

counties we recognize today. In 1820, as proves true until 1850, African-American population in the upper Ohio Valley is greater south of the Ohio River. Three thousand four hundred eighty-one African-Americans (2.49 % of total population) live on the South side of the river and only 906 (.93 % of total populations) on the north side. In 1850, the tide begins to turn. Three thousand seven hundred seventy-six African-Americans live to the north, and only 3,148 live to the south. However, the percentage of total population of African-Americans steadily decreases in the upper Ohio Valley from 1820 - 1860: from 5.58 % in 1820 to 2.19 % in 1860. The population in the upper Ohio Valley after the Civil War increases from 360,886 to 424,320. The African-Americans' percent of that population rises from 2.19 % in 1860 to 3.17 % in 1870.

Agriculture census records provide data on products produced in the Ohio Valley; slave schedules provide the names of slave owners; population census provide occupations of slave owners and free African-Americans; and land and personal property tax records help locate the slave plantations and free African-Americans and contrasts the degree of prosperity of slave owners, free African-Americans, and others. All of these records as well as county property and vital records provide the best data available on African-Americans in the upper Ohio Valley. The research analyzes this data and uses it in concert with the few existing personal accounts of African-Americans in the Ante-bellum upper Ohio Valley to answer to the best of the researcher's ability the following questions:

- How much agriculture product can be contributed to slave labor?
- Were farming slave owners more prosperous than non-slave owning farmers?
- Were all free African-American farmers in the upper Ohio Valley subsistence farmers?
- What was the impact of the Underground Railroad on slavery and agriculture in the upper Ohio Valley?

For the purpose of this research, the researcher divided Virginia's Ohio River Counties into three groups: the Panhandle Counties (Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, &

Marshall); the Mid-Ohio Valley Counties (Wetzel, Tyler, Pleasants, & Wood); and the Southern Ohio Valley Counties (Jackson, Mason, Cabell, & Wayne). Slavery in each section developed differently much as slavery in Eastern and Western Virginia did due to the proximity of north and the south cultures and abolitionists ideals.

Agriculture, along with mining and manufacturing, are the means to create wealth. Service and retail sales merely redistribute the wealth. African-Americans, in what became West Virginia, created wealth in agriculture, mining (salt mines), and manufacturing (to a lesser degree in what little industry the region had to offer) as well as services performed by free African-Americans who were barbers, stone masons, tanners, carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers, millers, cooks, servants, ferrymen, carters, and free labor.

Agriculture in the Ohio Valley was traced through the 1850 and 1860 US Agriculture Census in order to answer the question "how much agriculture product can be contributed to slave labor?" For example, in 1850, slave owning farmers, for the most part, are the largest producers of the county's cash crops in all the Ohio River counties with significant numbers of slave owners: Ohio, Wood, Mason, Cabell, and Wayne Counties. Prior to 1850, the US Census did not list individual farmer's products, and there is no data to separate the products of slave owners from non-slave owners. Thus, in agriculture, documenting agriculture products produced by slave labor is difficult.

Even though almost half the population along the Ohio River in Virginia was in the Panhandle, the Southern most counties raised more cattle, corn, and produced more homemade manufactured goods. The Panhandle produced the largest amount of wheat, oats, butter, and over 70% of the wool in Virginia's Ohio Valley as well as raised over 70% of the sheep in the Valley. The Panhandle, also, had the largest number of improved acres, 45% compared to 33% in the south. The Mid-Ohio counties products were generally between the Panhandle and Southern most counties in there production, but the Mid-Ohio counties had the lowest population along the Ohio River in Virginia.

For the question, "Were farming slave owners more prosperous than non-slave owning farmers?" Personal and real property records were utilized as well as county histories. Most slave owners, especially those with the largest number of slaves, proved to be wealthy leaders in their prospective counties. Often non-slave owning leaders could trace their roots back to slave owning ancestors who first established their wealth and leadership in the county. Possibly the best example in the Ohio Valley Region of Virginia was the Jenkins Family of Cabell County.

A wealthy Capt. William Jenkins sold his shipping business prior to 1820. He purchased, in Rockbridge County, Virginia, a small farm prior to 1810. In 1810, Capt. William Jenkins reported owning 17 slaves, and in 1820, 19 slaves (one free male African-American, 14-26 years old lived in his household) (Rockbridge Co. 1810 & 20). Capt. Jenkins married into a prominent Tidewater Virginia family when he wed Jeanette Grigsby McNutt in 1824. In that year, he purchased the Greenbottom Plantation with thirty slaves from William Cabell, a former Governor of Virginia, that was established, in 1811, by Cary Nicholas, another former Governor of Virginia. Fifty-three slaves labored on the plantation by 1820.

The Jenkins Family had the largest slave plantation in Cabell County with 57 slaves in 1850. The plantation was located at Green Bottom with total acreage of 4395 with 1500 improved acres which was the highest in county. In the land tax records, the Jenkins Family had \$5000 worth of buildings the highest value in the county; the total value of the land was \$80,000. The Jenkins had the highest value of farm implements & equipment, and in most products produced, the highest yield in the county. African-American slaves worked to produce, in 1850: 900 bushels of wheat; 40000 bushels of Indian corn; and 300 lbs of butter. The slaves tended 29 horses, which was the largest number of horses, and 20 milch cows, second largest number in the county, as well as 12 oxen, and the largest number of cattle, 173. In addition, the slaves tended 600 swine, the largest number

in the county. The Jenkins Family owned the highest value of livestock in the county, \$6,835.

Therefore, slaves on the Jenkins Plantation spent time in the field, tending livestock, and raising horses as well as other labor required to run a plantation. Docks on the Ohio River had warehouses for products that had to be shipped. Because only \$90 of homemade manufactures were listed, an artisan community probably did not develop much beyond what was needed on the plantation. However, such a large agricultural operation required numerous craftsmen to construct the main house, slave cabins, warehouses, barns, and other dependencies. The Jenkins household slaves did not need to attend to a large family. Only four children were raised by Capt. Jenkins and his wife who died in 1843. Mrs. Jenkins read from the Bible to the slaves and some could read. There is a debated as to whether or not the slaves were formerly educated because church records do indicated that some of the slaves could read or write. Since Virginia only taxed male slaves over the age of 12, the Jenkins slaves were two-thirds female and one-third male with over half the slaves under the age of 10 years. By 1860, the Jenkins Plantation was the largest slave labor plantation on the Ohio River in Virginia with over 80 slaves producing agriculture products that were sold to growing cities on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

Capt. William Jenkins reported his wealth, in 1850, as \$89,000. The wealth produced on the plantation by slave labor allowed the son of Capt. Jenkins, Albert Gallatin Jenkins, to rise to prominence in politics and later to the position of Brig. General in the Confederate Army. Albert Gallatin received an undergraduate degree from Jefferson College in 1848 and received a Law Degree from Harvard University in 1850. In 1856, without previous political experience, Albert was elected to the US Congress House of Representatives where he served until 1860. After Virginia succeed from the United States, he was appointed to the Provisional Confederate Congress. Albert married, in 1858, Virginia Southard Bowlin, daughter of Judge James Butler Bowlin, a former Congressman from Missouri and US representative to Colombia and Paraguay. Albert

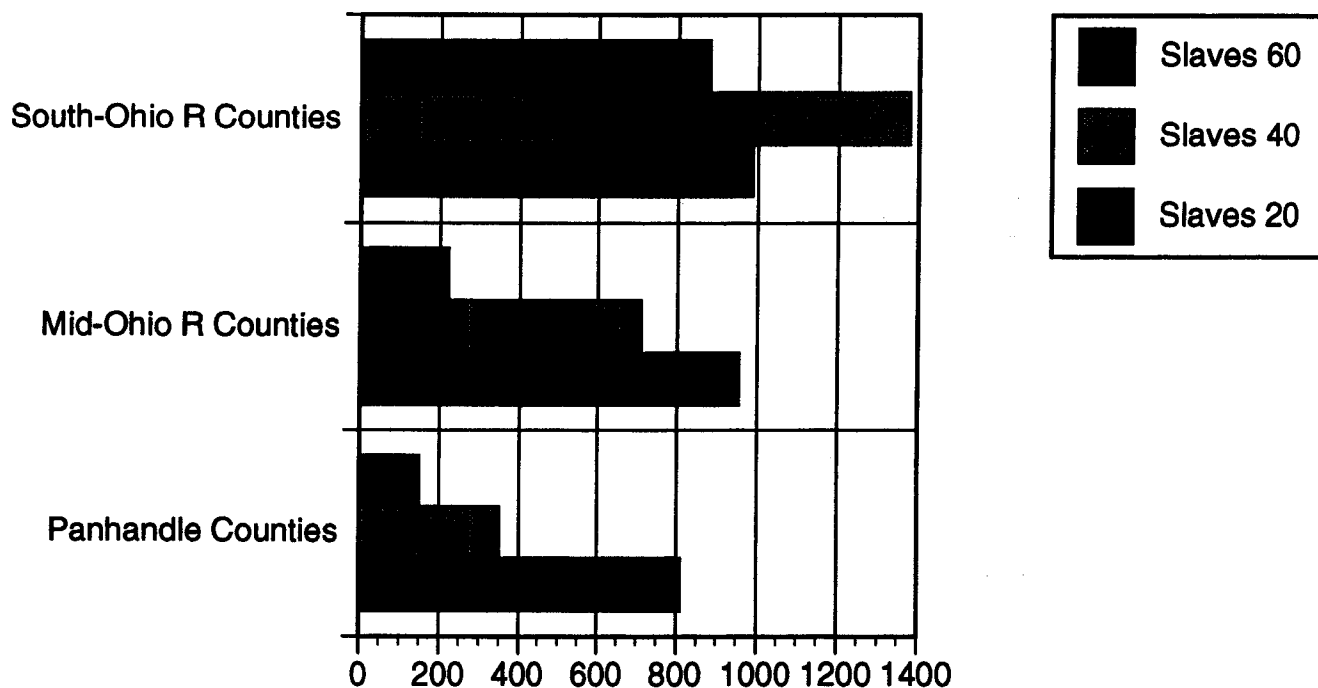
joined the Confederate Army, in 1861, as a Captain; he was soon promoted to Colonel, and by August 1862, he was already a Brigadier General. Albert Gallatin's siblings, also, prospered because of Capt. William Jenkins wealth and influence: William A. Jenkins received an undergraduate and a medical degree from Jefferson College; Thomas Jefferson Jenkins received an undergraduate from Jefferson College; and Eustacia Jenkins was educated at Steubenville Female Seminary and the Cincinnati Ohio Conservatory of Music. The Jenkins Family owned property in Lynchburg, Virginia; Ironton, Ohio; Cincinnati, Ohio; and St. Louis, MO. Therefore, it is obvious that the wealth created by slave labor allowed the Jenkins family not only to prosper, but also, to reach a high level of leadership in the State and Nation.

In answer to the question, "Were all free African-American farmers in Virginia's Ohio Valley subsistence farmers?" Most African-Americans in agriculture were laborers. A few African-Americans reported, in 1850 and 1860, their occupation to be farmer. According to land tax records, of the African-American farmers, only a handful owned land. The Agriculture Census which required farmers who produced over \$50 worth of agricultural products to report provides the answer. In 1850 and 1860, none of the African-American farmers reported in the Agriculture Census. Therefore, the answer to the question is yes; the existing records show that free African-American farmers in Virginia's Ohio Valley were subsistence farmers. The reason for this is not found in the records, but more than likely, because of the prejudices of the pre-Civil War Ohio Valley region of Virginia, free African-Americans were dissuade from competing in the region's greatest producer of wealth, agriculture.

What was the impact of the Underground Railroad on slavery and agriculture in the upper Ohio Valley? Slavery in the Ohio Valley naturally brought about Underground Railroad activity in the region. It is difficult to determine the number of fugitives before 1850 because they are not reported in the census, but numerous stories of escaped slaves and those who helped do survive. Virginia counties' slave population above the Wood-



Jackson border dropped 36% between 1840 and 1850 (1056 slaves to 675). Below the Wood-Jackson border, slave population dropped only 12% (1456 slaves to 1283). The Underground Railroad is accredited by researchers with the decline in the number of slaves and slave holders in the region especially in the northern counties.



Slave Population of Ohio Valley in Virginia: 1820, 1840, 1860.

Wilbur H. Siebert's map published in *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*, in 1898, shows an extensive network of Underground Railroad lines moving from the Ohio River north through Ohio into Canada. Even though Siebert does not show any lines south of the Ohio River, it is obvious that slaves found their way north to the Ohio River by some routes. Oral history and early written accounts shed some light on the mysteries of the Underground Railroad south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Many accounts of fugitive slaves following Virginia's rivers north to the River Jordan / Ohio River exist. However, these accounts are generally void of detail in order to protect those who helped and who were still living in the south after the Civil War.

Researchers are currently examining the possibility that members of the Society of Friends / Quakers that migrated from Clarksburg, (West) Virginia to Ohio left behind families along the route, approximately along Route 50, to aid fugitive slaves. Quakers did live in Virginia along Route 50, and some of the families were rumored to have assisted fugitives such as Nutter family. Several Quaker families settled on the Ohio Side of the Ohio River and are reported to have operated Underground Railroad Stations such as the Quakers of Quakers Bottom in Lawrence County. According to the research of Dr. Alan Gould, these Quakers traveled to Ohio from Clarksburg in the 1810s. Henry Burke (author of *Mason-Dixon Line: the Underground Railroad Along the Ohio River*) has completed extensive research on Underground Railroad activities in the Parkersburg-Marietta area where Route 50 crosses the Ohio River.

In the northern Ohio Valley counties, slave owners found owning slaves just not worth the trouble such as the Henderson Family. The Hendersons were a prominent family who gained prosperity and influence with wealth obtained from slave labor. The Henderson Family moved into the Ohio Valley from Tidewater Virginia in the early 1800s about the same time that Harman Blennerhasset moved to his island near Parkersburg. While living in Tidewater, the Hendersons attended church with George Washington's family. Thus, when Mr. Blennerhasset told Mr. Alexander Henderson, Jr. about his plans to start a Revolution in the West, Mr. Henderson notified Washington of the plans. Mr. Alexander Henderson, Jr.'s son, George Washington Henderson began his plantation in the 1820s. In 1830, George W. Henderson had 8 slaves, and by 1840, he had 24 slaves. However, after several slaves escaped the Henderson Plantation, a slave catcher in pursuit of the fugitives was shot and killed by one of the fugitives in Ohio. Ohio and Virginia both wanted to try the case. Ohio tried the case and acquitted the fugitive. The two states argued over the case all the way to the US Supreme Court. The George Henderson Family did not own slaves again. They still prospered. In the 1850s they hired an architect and constructed an Italianate front addition to the house.

An example of the Underground Railroad activity in the Kanawha Valley is the story of John Fairfield who was a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Mr. Fairfield was asked by some free African-Americans in Ohio to rescue their relatives in Kanawha County near the salt works. In early Spring with two freemen that posed as his slaves Mr. Fairfield arrived in Kanawha County posing as a salt merchant from Louisville, Kentucky. He contracted the building of two boats to transport the salt to Louisville. His two free African-American comrades mingled among the slave population and prepared for the rescue attempt. The first salt boat was finished on a weekend. One of the freemen posing as a slave commandeered the boat, loaded several local slaves aboard, and escaped down the Kanawha River to Ohio. The missing boat and slaves were not missed until Monday due to the escape occurring on the weekend. Mr. Fairfield expressed complete surprise that his slave who he believed to be loyal took off with the boat and other slaves. A posse, including Mr. Fairfield, pursued the escaping slaves into Ohio, but they could not be found. Mr. Fairfield assured the people of Kanawha County that his other slave was very loyal, and he requested that the second boat be completed. As soon as the second boat was completed, the very same thing happened again. Once again, a posse was formed and the escaping slaves pursued; however, this time Mr. Fairfield went one way and the other posse members another. Mr. Fairfield was not seen again. These accounts easily explain why slavery declined in the Ohio River Valley.

In the southern Ohio Valley counties' slaves, also, escaped. For example, at the Jenkins Plantation in Cabell County, at least one slave escaped before 1824 because when the Jenkins Family purchased the plantation a runaway slave was listed in the deed with about thirty other slaves. Two other accounts of fugitive slaves appear in local court records because Capt. William Jenkins went to court to retrieve a slave on two occasions when he could not work out a fee with the slave catchers.

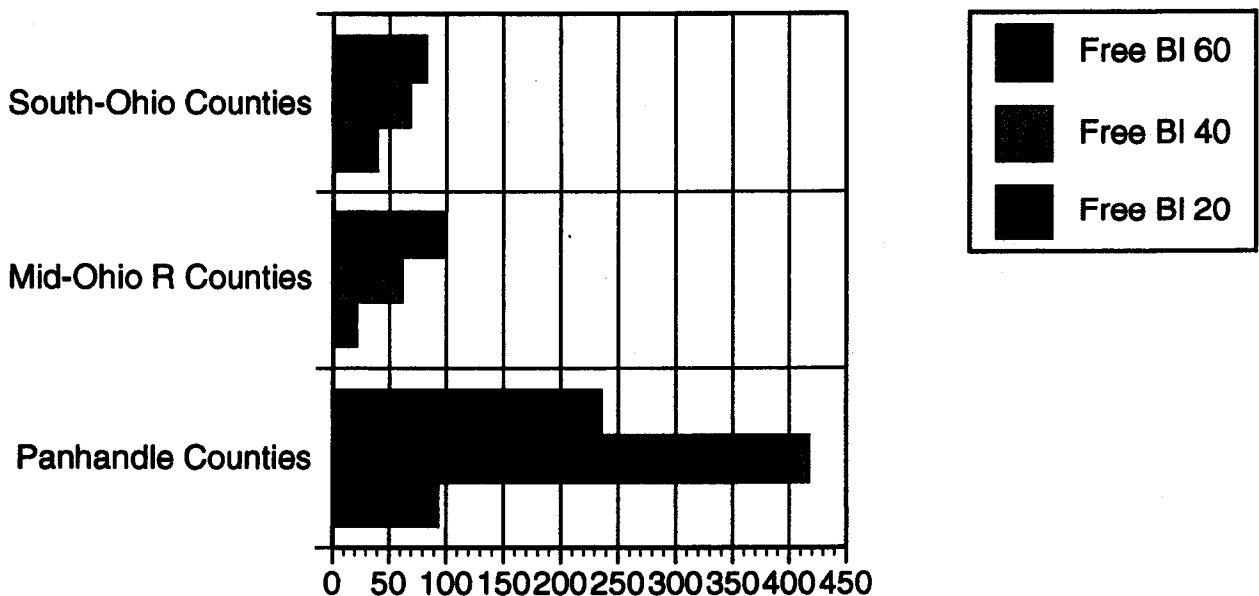
African-Americans along the Ohio River operated Underground Railroad stations such as African-Americans living in Lawrence County, Ohio. In 1850, 268 African-

Americans lived in Lawrence County. One hundred fifty-five of the 268 lived in Fayette Township which includes the region around Burlington, an area known for its many Underground Railroad stations.

Also in Cabell County, a fugitive, Asbury Parker, escaped into Ohio by crossing the Ohio River where today the Westmoreland community of Huntington is located. This account can be found in Wilbur H. Siebert's book: *The Ohio Underground Railroad*.

Sampson Sanders' slaves did not escape on the Underground Railroad, but Mr. Sanders freed all 50 of his slaves in his will in 1849. He left instructions with his executors to relocate his slaves in free territory and provided them with money to get started in their new lives. Clearly, Mr. Sanders was influenced by local abolition thought.

Another phenomenon that occurs in the Upper Ohio Valley that deserves comment is the exodus of free blacks from Virginia after 1850. Could this be due to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850? Further research is required to determine if fugitive slaves moved into northern Virginia, and after 1850, the fugitives no longer felt safe living there.



Free Black Population of Ohio Valley in Virginia: 1820, 1840, 1860.

In conclusion, African-American slaves did contribute to the economic growth of the Upper Ohio Valley by producing wealth through the sale by owners of agricultural goods they cultivated and harvested. The wealth they created was utilized by their owners to gain prominence in politics and society. However, free African-American farmers in Virginia's Ohio Valley were not able to create the same level of wealth and achieve the same level of power as the white farmers. In addition, the Underground Railroad's activity in the Valley impacted slavery by decreasing the number of slaves especially in the panhandle counties.

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